

Acting Edition

Evanston Salt Costs Climbing

by Will Arbery

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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“Angel From Montgomery”

Written by John Prine

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ISBN 978-0-573-71066-7

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EVANSTON SALT COSTS CLIMBING had its world premiere at the White Heron Theater in Nantucket, Massachusetts, on August 30, 2018. It was produced by New Neighborhood and Jay Alix & Una Jackman. It was directed by Dustin Wills. The scenic design was by Jean Kim, the lighting design was by Masha Tsimring, the sound design was by Tyler Kieffer, the costume design was by Seth Bodie, and the projection design was by Nicholas Hussong. The production stage manager was Hannah Wichmann. The cast was as follows:

BASIL Justin Kirk
PETERHoward Overshown
MAIWORM..... Keira Naughton
JANE JR...... Rachel Sachnoff

EVANSTON SALT COSTS CLIMBING had its New York premiere at The New Group on November 14, 2022. It played in the Alice Griffin Jewel Box Theatre at the Pershing Square Signature Center. It was directed by Danya Taymor. The scenic design was by Matt Saunders, the lighting design was by Isabella Byrd, the sound design was by Mikael Sulaiman, additional sound design was by Evan Cook, and the costume design was by Sarafina Bush. Choreography was by Tilly Evans-Krueger, and the voice and text coach was Gigi Buffington. The production stage manager was Rachel Denise April. The cast was as follows:

BASILKen Leung
PETERJeb Kreager
MAIWORM..... Quincy Tyler Bernstine
JANE JR...... Rachel Sachnoff

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Danya. Wow, we did it. How? Love you. Thank you to the thing underneath everything. Thank you Rachel Sachnoff, Quincy Tyler Bernstine, Jeb Kreager, and Ken Leung, for going down into that feeling for us, over and over again. Thank you to Scott Elliott, Ian Morgan, Teresa Gozzo, Cam Camden, Victoria Keese, and everyone at The New Group. Thank you to the Griffin at the Signature. Thank you Isabella Byrd, Sarafina Bush, Mikael Sulaiman, Evan Cook, Joshua Yocom, Ann James, Gigi Buffington, Tilly Evans-Krueger, and Matt Saunders. Thank you Rachel April, Stephen Varnado, Sydney Colter. Thank you Joan Sergay. Thank you Jacob Robinson. Thank you Justin Kirk, Keira Naughton, and Howard Overshown. Thank you Dustin Wills. Thank you Tyler Kieffer, Masha Tsimring, Jean Kim, Nicholas Hussong, Hannah Wichmann, and Seth Bodie. Thank you Thomas Bradshaw, John MacGregor, Olivier Sultan, Eva Dickerman, Elise Kibler, Jesse Armstrong, Kate Dakota Kremer, Rolin Jones, Adam O'Byrne, Una Jackman, Jay Alix, Rebecca Kitt, The White Heron, Robert Egan, Emily James, Shannon Cochran, Casey Stangl, Jess Chayes, Ben Beckley, Michael Shannon, Larry Powell, and Ned Eisenberg. Thank you, John Prine! And thank you, Yi Huang. You got me through. You seeing this play, seeing what it was, got me through. I love you. So many more people. (All there ever was was people.) But one particular person more than any. Rachel, thanks for being my best friend. This book is dedicated to you, aslt.

CHARACTERS

BASIL – male, Greek, salt truck driver, 50s

PETER – male, Evanstonian, salt truck driver, 40s

MAIWORM – female, Evanstonian, public works administrator, 50s

JANE JR. – female, Evanstonian, volunteer, 20s

SETTING

Evanston, IL

TIME

Three Januarys

2014

2015

2016

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The **LADY IN THE PURPLE HAT** appears three times.

She wears a wide-brimmed felt purple hat and an old-flowers dress.

The first time, she's played by the actor playing Jane Jr.

The second time, she's played by the actor playing Maiworm.

The third time, she's played by the actor playing Peter.

2014

*(The break room at the Evanston salt dome.
PETER and BASIL are drinking coffee. BASIL
is reading from a sheet of paper.)*

BASIL. “That summer seemed to last forever. The whole family had been cursed since. Now it wasn’t so much a legend as real life. The girl stopped running. As she stopped to catch her breath, she looked back. As she searched, her movements were frantic.” The end.

PETER. I like it.

BASIL. Thanks.

PETER. Wait, that’s how it ends?

BASIL. Yeh.

PETER. I like it.

BASIL. Thanks.

PETER. I like how it takes place in summer.

BASIL. Yeh.

PETER. Wha’d you do last night?

BASIL. I made a big salad but it was gross. Then for a while, you know, for a pretty long time, I stood at my kitchen window and played with my dick.

PETER. Yeah. I feel that. Did I tell you about the hot tub?

BASIL. No.

PETER. The hot tub’s too small for anyone to use. I’m gonna get rid of the hot tub. Hot tubs have zero value.

PETER. It's like selling used toothbrushes. Basil, I want to kill myself.

(Pause.)

BASIL. You want to end your life?

PETER. Yeah.

BASIL. Well, don't.

(MAIWORM enters.)

MAIWORM. Listen to this. They wrote an article about us!

(She holds up the newspaper and reads.)

“EVANSTON SALT COSTS CLIMBING. By Bill Agrigento. Relentless winter storms are driving Evanston's salt costs to approximately \$500,000, officials reported in a memo. Evanston city staff will ask aldermen on Monday to approve a purchase of rock salt in the amount of \$70,128 from Morton Salt. Evanston Public Works Director Jackie Thorstensen and Assistant Director *Jane Maiworm* wrote in the memo –”

PETER. Oh...!

BASIL. Ho ho...!

PETER. Mentioned by name.

BASIL. Maiworm here in the paper.

PETER. Maiworm over here. Congratulations Maiworm.

MAIWORM. Thanks ah well it's nothing. But what am I gonna say, that it's not nice? It's nice. Usually in these I'm just *an official*, and meanwhile it's *Jackie Thorstensen said*, and *Jackie Thorstensen said*.

BASIL. Right!

MAIWORM. Anyway.

BASIL. Right!

MAIWORM. Anyway. “Unfortunately due to an early snowfall in November and an active December,’ Thorstensen and Maiworm reported –”

BASIL & PETER. Maiworm over here!

MAIWORM. “Unfortunately due to an early snowfall in November and an active December,’ Thorstensen and Maiworm reported, staff needed to spend an additional \$70,128 ‘to ensure salt supplies were not depleted going into the heaviest snow fall of the season thus far, on Dec. 31.”

BASIL. Right. Hoo-hoo!

MAIWORM. “Officials had reported earlier that snow removal costs are climbing. The city spent a total of \$411,261 through the first two big storms of the year, on Dec. 31, and last week’s blizzard on Jan. 4. \$232,418 of that was for overtime (THAT’S YOU!). Miscellaneous costs included overtime (THAT’S YOU!) for tree removals and pothole repairs, which were needed as a result of the frigid temperatures, officials said.” Pretty cool, huh fellows?

BASIL. Interesting, for sure. I didn’t know the costs were climbing.

PETER. I knew the costs were climbing. I mean it makes sense.

BASIL. I mean it makes sense, but I didn’t know they could climb so high. What does that do to everything?

MAIWORM. Well, it’s a pressure on everyone. It’s a sharper pressure.

BASIL. More work for us.

MAIWORM. More work for us, exactly.

PETER. But that article isn't really about us, no offense. "Overtime" is not my name. They should write a thing about what's it like on the roads, with the salt.

BASIL. What do you mean what it's like?

PETER. Like about what it's like out there when we're salting the roads.

BASIL. No one wants to read that. We drive, we salt. The end. Stories gotta have...like, pull.

MAIWORM. I agree.

PETER. Pool?

BASIL. Pull to pull you in.

MAIWORM. Pull you in exactly. This article's a little more administrative which I think is cool.

PETER. I think it's cool when we salt the roads. Sometimes people honk at us. Things fall down. The light's always changing. I think the noises when it hits the road is good. We have funny conversation in the front. It's cold. It's –

MAIWORM. Hahahaha yep. Well. Fun day already! Uh-oh. You guys gotta hit the road in like four minutes.

BASIL & PETER. Alright Maiworm.

(**MAIWORM** *exits.*)

PETER. We get an article written about us and that's what they write. They don't even have our names in it. Fucking Maiworm gets her name in it. I was just trying to think about how it might be cool to have a thing about Peter and Basil. A story, but instead of written with words, it's written with sounds and ice, that tell the story of Peter and Basil.

BASIL. Get over it. America is upressed with names. In Greece no one gets names written about. We just live

and have meals and do normal human drama. Without worrying about is like: is it fantastic human drama?

PETER. Isn't Greece where all the Drama started?

BASIL. Yeh but now we're so over it.

PETER. Well I'm sorry this isn't Greece.

BASIL. Me too, so. Because. It's warm there.

PETER. Well I'm sorry Evanston is cold.

BASIL. Me too.

(They drink coffee.)

PETER. My daughter's writing a story about me.

BASIL. Oh yeh? What about?

PETER. Just, fuckin...about me.

BASIL. Huh. I don't think your daughter's story would have much by way of...like, what, pull.

PETER. Fuck you

BASIL. No fuck you haha

PETER. Fuck you

BASIL. No fuck you

PETER. Fuck you haha

BASIL. No fuck you

PETER. Fuck you

BASIL. No fuck you

PETER. Fuck you haha

BASIL. No fuck you

PETER. Fuck you

BASIL. Okay hahaha.

PETER. I'm gonna kill you motherfucker I'm gonna fuck you up.

BASIL. No you won't I'm too pretty.

PETER. Pretty how.

BASIL. Just pretty.

PETER. Pretty in what way.

BASIL. Just a pretty guy.

PETER. Hahahaha.

BASIL. Hahaha.

PETER. FUCK laughing. I can't even look my wife in the eyes. The sight of my daughter depresses me. I know she's not gonna be very smart and it just seems like she's gonna become one of those chubby women who work at like a library or a church. That's just how it seems to me. Like a 99% prophecy. And it makes me wanna kill myself.

BASIL. Come on. Stop. Rude.

PETER. Rude to who?

BASIL. To those women.

PETER. It's not rude. Fuck you. Those women are fine. She can be one of them. It's fine. It just makes me wanna kill myself.

BASIL. Yeh. Okay. Peter.

PETER. Nevermind. Fuck me. Sorry.

BASIL. Okay no. Mmmmmmmmm okay listen. Okay. Let me just try to. Okay. You're reminding me so much of. Nevermind. Mmm. Hm. Yeh. No I mean. Right right right.

PETER. Yeah?

BASIL. I mean, it's...it's it's it's. Yeh it's definitely hard. Even in Greece. On good days. Pretty days in the sun. Nobody leaves you alone. So you'd just look around and sometimes wanna kinda die. I know. But. At the end of the, whole. It's just. "Come on." Yeh?

PETER. No I mean that makes sense.

BASIL. Yeh, just a little...you know, you know who you are. And today's. But today will be better. Hahaha, but. You know we'll have good times in the truck.

PETER. True true true true true.

BASIL. Are you still feeling sadness?

PETER. A little. I can't help it. Are you?

BASIL. No.

PETER. Thanks for trying to cheer me up but it takes a while to sink in. My toes are cold.

BASIL. It's a cold day.

PETER. Negative seventeen. Butta time. Suppa time for us. Butta time.

BASIL. Butta time

PETER. Okay but have you thought about what it would be like to die?

BASIL. Like what, or like what, the feeling?

PETER. The feeling, yeah, of the dying, when it happens, what's going on in your heart or brain.

BASIL. Peter, are you asking me to go down into that feeling with you?

(**MAIWORM** enters.)

MAIWORM. Oh no. I have some bad news and it's bad.

PETER. Okay.

MAIWORM. Bill Agrigento killed himself this morning.

BASIL. Oh no.

PETER. Who the fuck is Bill Agrigento?

MAIWORM. He's the guy who wrote the article about us.

BASIL. Oh no.

PETER. "Evanston Salt Costs Climbing"?

MAIWORM. Yeah.

BASIL. Shit. Sad. Ah!

MAIWORM. We were the last thing he ever wrote about.

(They let this sink in.)

PETER. Is that why he did it?

MAIWORM. I have no possible idea, I don't know. Oh my God. I knew him. He was nice. He loved tea. He lived on Lee Street. He had a whole wall of different tea. He showed me a picture.

(MAIWORM exits.)

PETER. Goddamnit.

BASIL. What?

PETER. I wanted to kill myself and then Bill Agrigento did.
There's nothing new that can be done.

BASIL. You thought killing yourself was a new thing that could be done?

PETER. I dunno, yeah.

BASIL. That is one of the oldest things to be done, I think, as a human activity.

PETER. Well so there's nothing new that can be done.

BASIL. There are new things that can be done.

PETER. Like what.

BASIL. I dunno. No one has ever done for example uh. This:

(BASIL goes up to PETER. He grabs PETER's butt cheeks. He kneels down and talks into PETER's butt.)

Winter bunkfuck, all gas zebra, float off bumbleboy.
Float away bumbleboy to a warmer sheeeeeeeen!
Happen forever happen ever grip!

(PETER laughs and moves away. He gets really sad.)

PETER. Fuck.

BASIL. What?

PETER. It just...it won't go away.

BASIL. Yeh. Fuck. Uh well. Yeh.

(MAIWORM enters.)

MAIWORM. I just, hey guys. I just. I've been feeling really rattled by this news, and I just wanted to say: I appreciate everything that you are in my life. You always have a home, in me. And if you ever need anything, please talk to me. You're good men. And.

BASIL & PETER. Thanks Maiworm.

(MAIWORM nods a lot. Then she takes a deep breath. We hear the sound of a salt truck backing into the warehouse. She looks at her watch.)

MAIWORM. Oh, you should probably hit the road. And I should head over to the office. This *day*. This –

(She leaves.)

PETER. We should get on the road.

BASIL. Yeh.

(They get ready to leave.)

Peter, it's pretty simple, you need to be a little more okay with –

PETER. Shut the fuck up, honestly, Basil. You've been patronizing as fuck to me all morning. Ah. Sorry.

BASIL. That's uh

PETER. Uh. I love your story, though. About summer. Really. You should do something with that.

*(They head out. **BASIL** leaves first. As he exits, **PETER** slaps his own face, hard, over and over.)*

(Now:)

*(**MAIWORM** is standing outside in her nightgown and slippers. **JANE JR.** comes outside wrapped in a blanket. There is a snowstorm happening.)*

JANE JR. Mom? What are you doing out here? It's freezing!

MAIWORM. Oh I'm sorry Jane Jr., I was having the most horrible dream. Go back to bed.

JANE JR. What happened in the dream?

MAIWORM. It was – oh gosh, sorry but, to be honest it was about the dead. All the dead. They were rising up in a blurry chorus, and Bill Agrigento was getting fused into them. It was scary.

JANE JR. The guy who killed himself? Well now I'm gonna have nightmares about that!

MAIWORM. But then it became about heated permeable pavers.

JANE JR. What are that? Is those.

MAIWORM. Well they're... nevermind, they're a new technology. I can't get them out of my head.

JANE JR. (*Shuddering from the cold.*) What're they for?

MAIWORM. Well don't worry. They're roads that heat themselves. They're de-icing technology. Permeable paving is paving that lets the water, when it rains, fall on top of it and drain right through to the ground, through to the ground below. The surface is both smooth *and* porous. They invented it so that rainwater didn't have to go through the gutter and all the way under the city and all the way off-site for treatment. But *heated* permeable pavers are permeable pavers with heat things under them. So you can imagine what this means.

JANE JR. I can?

MAIWORM. It means that during ice storms, the ice melts right away, and the water goes right down into the ground, instead of remaining on the surface and refreezing into ice. So it solves like fifty million problems at once. No more plowing except in extreme cases. No more salt. Anyway I've been looking into it, it's a task I gave myself. So you add all this up, and you can imagine what this means.

JANE JR. I don't know if I can.

MAIWORM. It's objectively better. Sorry to say. They're trying them out over in Rock Island and Davenport. They worked in Nebraska. And we've got some real curious parties. Polly from Northwestern is even interested in testing them out on campus. But gosh, Jane Jr., it would be such a big change. It'd put all the truck guys like Peter and Basil out of work. And imagine the construction. And do I trust a road like that? A ground like that? With little secret characters underneath it? Like is this Evanston or is this

Disneyton? Heated permeable pavers. I feel as though they're coming. And one day, acting upon the orders of the dead, they'll rise up from the ground and wrap around us until we – anyway. Just a dream. Just a little nervousness. How was your day?

JANE JR. It was okay. I helped out a lot at the nursing home.

MAIWORM. That's great. Did you sing?

JANE JR. Yeah I sang.

MAIWORM. What'd you sing?

JANE JR. "Angel from Montgomery." Dave Matthews Band version.

MAIWORM. Wish I could have heard it.

JANE JR. It wasn't very good.

MAIWORM. Oh, look, there go Peter and Basil in the salt truck. It must be late or early, wow! Wave!

(They wave to them. A honk in response.)

JANE JR. We should go inside. It's so cold.

MAIWORM. Yeah. They're calling it a polar vortex.

JANE JR. A bipolar vortex?

MAIWORM. No, a polar vortex. I hope everyone's safe on the roads tonight. I just worry for this town.

JANE JR. Okay but don't worry about the heated permeable pavers, Mom. They're not here yet. It's still salt right now for the roads.

MAIWORM. Anyhow.

(She takes a deep breath. The wind roars.)

It's still salt right now for the roads.

(Now:)

*(PETER and BASIL are in the salt truck.
They're really cold. PETER is driving.)*

BASIL. I was thinking about writing another new story.

PETER. *(Coughing a little.)* Huh okm. Cool. Okahm. Sorry.
Cool.

BASIL. Based on me, on real things of my life.

PETER. Oh yeah. Good good. Right.

(PETER keeps checking the heat.)

Does it feel like anything's coming out?

BASIL. It's coming, it's warming.

PETER. Hm. Hm. Fuck.

BASIL. It's warming, it's coming. Look.

PETER. Fuck. Yeah. Fuck.

BASIL. It is.

PETER. Hm.

BASIL. See.

PETER. Fuck.

BASIL. Feel it.

PETER. Fuck. Hm. I don't know. Fuck.

BASIL. See.

PETER. Okam

BASIL. Feel it.

PETER. Okam.

BASIL. Feel it. It's okay.

PETER. Yeah? No. Fuck.

(**BASIL** realizes there's no heat coming out.)

BASIL. Fuck.

PETER. Yeah.

BASIL. Fuck. Ah, fuck.

PETER. Yeah, see?

BASIL. Fuck. Fuck.

PETER. Yeah, fuck.

BASIL. I just fuck.

PETER. Yeah I don't think it is.

BASIL. Fuck. But it will.

PETER. I don't think it is.

BASIL. It will, it will, it always does.

PETER. I don't think it will. I don't think IT IS, BASIL.

BASIL. It will. Shh, it's fine, it is.

PETER. I don't know if IT IS, BASIL.

BASIL. Fuck.

PETER. Right?

BASIL. Fuck.

PETER. Right. Right.

BASIL. It might not.

PETER. Right.

BASIL. Fuck.

PETER. It broke. It fucking broke.

BASIL. But why would it break

PETER. The core could be

BASIL. What, clogged

PETER. The tubes could be

BASIL. Leaking?, what

PETER. There's no smell, there's a smell if it's leaking

BASIL. The fan maybe broke

PETER. Or the water froze

BASIL. But there's antifreeze

PETER. Or the antifreeze froze

BASIL. It shouldn't break, it cannot break

PETER. It broke

BASIL. No way, fuck no. The cold has entered my heart.

PETER. The cold has entered my heart. It's minus thirty.

BASIL. Thirty below. Hahaha.

PETER. "Feels like."

BASIL. "Feels like."

PETER. Feels like thirty fucking below.

BASIL. Hahaha "feels like," fuck

PETER. Hahahaha.

BASIL. (*Hyper-articulated.*) Hahahahaha, ha ha! Ha! Oh fuck, and an uh and an uh and a haha.

PETER. (*Hyper-articulated.*) Yes fuckin ha and a Ha and a Ha and a Bunkfuck.

BASIL. Hahahaha

PETER. Hahahaha FUCK laughing.

BASIL. FUCK laughing.

PETER. Hahahaha.

BASIL. Good.

PETER. Real good.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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